"PLAN COLOMBIA": ASSESSING US-COLOMBIA COUNTERINSURGENCY AND COUNTERDRUG STRATEGIES

A Monograph
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ABSTRACT

"PLAN COLOMBIA": ASSESSING U.S.-COLOMBIA COUNTERINSURGENCY AND COUNTERDRUG STRATEGIES by MAJ Paul S. Warren, USA, 45 pages.

Colombia remains one of the most troubled countries in South America. The continued export of drugs coupled with a significant insurgent threat and increased violence against civilians, signals a crisis capable of disrupting the entire region. Insurgent groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Front (ELN), and paramilitaries (AUC) have de facto control over large areas of the country and are funded primarily by trafficking cocaine and heroin to the United States and Europe.

The U.S. has always maintained a strategic interest in Colombia and her neighboring states. Sixty-percent of U.S. oil is imported from Venezuela. Colombia's trade with U.S. companies exceeds $11 billion annually and is the fifth largest market of U.S. made goods. However, the Colombian drug trade accounts for more than seventy-percent of the cocaine entering the U.S, characterizing Colombia as a violent and corrupt state teetering on the edge of collapse. Consequently, regional security and the promotion of stable democratic governments are at the cornerstone of U.S. policy.

The purpose of this monograph is to examine current U.S. and Colombian counter-drug strategies. Will the U.S. contribution in financial and military aid to "Plan Colombia" ensure success? Is "Plan Colombia" an appropriate strategy for ending Colombia's insurgency and reducing or eradicating the export of drugs to Europe and North America, or does the plan require modification to achieve the desired end-state? Will greater engagement in the internal affairs of Colombia drag the U.S. into a regional conflict similar to Vietnam?

The monograph concludes that the implementation of Plan Colombia will begin the process of conflict resolution. Over time, military and financial aid from the U.S., European and Colombia's regional partners will bring to an end the civil war that started more than fifty-years ago. The strategic focus of Plan Colombia is imbedded in the ability to recognize existing linkages between the drug trade, the insurgency, and the paramilitaries. The success of Plan Colombia is dependent on recognizing the relationship between illegal drug trafficking and systemic violence, the role of the peace process, development of institutional strength, and the role played by the U.S. and the international community in providing support to conflict resolution.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Latin America has been characterized by periods of violent conflict and peaceful coexistence for over two hundred years. Yet as a new century begins, the reemergence of conflict with the potential to undermine U.S. national interests and the stability of the Southern Hemisphere are quickly gaining attention. Core states such as Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela are experiencing periods of instability that are reminiscent of the Reagan years when conflict in Latin America seemed the norm. While considerable progress has been made in the form of democratization and the adoption of market reforms, there has been a tendency to overlook or underestimate growing disintegrative forces that threaten regional stability.[1]

At the center of the debate over what to do about reemerging problems in Latin America is the U.S. role in countering the drug war and the spreading insurgency in Colombia. Colombia's inability to solve its internal problems caused by insurgency, narcotics trafficking, and the decay of institutional structures has the potential to disrupt the political and economic stability of periphery states, and to a greater extent, the region.

U.S. and Colombian policy makers recognize that they are at a critical juncture in the political and economic evolution of Latin America. In response, the implementation of "Plan Colombia" is a recent policy shift for 2001 and beyond, focusing on eradicating the flow of drugs to the U.S. and ending Colombia's forty-year old insurgency. Most opponents of the "plan" question whether the U.S. and European commitment to spend

[1] Donald E. Schulz, *The United States and Latin America: Shaping an Elusive Future* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 2000), 1.

$7.5 billion over a five-year period will have any lasting effect on the current political and economic situation in Colombia.

Will "Plan Colombia" work? Will the infusion of U.S. financial and military aid achieve the desired end-state, bringing to an end Colombia's cycle of violence and the export of drugs internationally, or will greater engagement in the internal affairs drag the U.S. into a regional conflict characteristic of U.S. involvement in Vietnam?

An analysis of past U.S. regional engagement strategies suggest that policy was focused more on stemming the flow of drugs and less on building a strong tradition of democratic governance and the rule of law. In an effort to satisfy the American public's desire to solve the domestic drug problem, U.S. policy toward the drug producing countries failed to address the more controversial issues of stagnant democratic institutions, growing insurgencies, and their relationship to narcotrafficking and terrorism.

Determining whether "Plan Colombia" will succeed may be dependent on crafting a strategy that addresses the fundamental weaknesses present in Colombia's current form of government. Additionally, U.S. and Colombian strategy must find the equitable balance between fighting the drug war, countering insurgency expansion, and ridding Colombia's democratic institutions of corruption and inefficiencies.

U.S. National Interests in the Americas

For almost two centuries the United States has sought to ensure that Latin America remains a secure, stable region, free of intervention from outside interests that pose potential threats to the security of the hemisphere. The U.S. historically has handled

its concerns within the region in a well-meaning but occasionally erratic way, with policies ranging from disengagement to invasion.[2] Despite the apparent inconsistency in U.S – Latin American policies, most of the region has never posed a threat or offered much economic opportunity until the end of the Cold War.

Latin America seems to be quietly transforming itself from a region characterized by violence and authoritarian regimes to a collection of viable democratic states. Yet there are exceptions to the rule, most notably Colombia, Mexico, Haiti and Cuba. While considerable progress has been made on some fronts – especially with regard to democratization and the adoption of market reforms – there has been the tendency to overlook or underestimate growing disintegrative forces that threaten the consolidation of democracy and regional stability.[3]

The danger to the U.S. is a return to political and economic conditions that characterized much of the Americas twenty years ago. Why is regional stability in the Americas important? From a broad perspective, the U.S. has always maintained vital and important interests within the region, the primary being economic.

> Growing economic markets put the region on the verge of becoming America's second largest trading partner. More than five hundred million Latinos are connected to the U.S. by geography, trade and culture. In 1999, Americans benefited from over three billion dollars in bilateral trade with the region, including nearly a third of U.S. oil imports.[4]

Given the importance of the trade relationship with the U.S., maintaining regional stability of the Americas becomes a critical issue.

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[2] INSS, Strategic Assessment 1999, 169.
[3] Schulz, 1.
[4] Stephen Johnson, "A New U.S. Policy for Latin America: Reopening the Window of Opportunity," *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder*, No. 1409 (Feb. 15, 2001), 1.

U.S. political interests tied to a National Security Strategy of "Engagement" continue to focus on the promotion of democracy. Supporting the development of democratic institutions may seem to be of a lesser U.S. national interest given a history of tolerance for authoritarian regimes of the past, but U.S. values now identify the role of legitimacy as a key component to political stability. Governments that develop strong democratic traditions that respect human rights and the rule of law are considered to be less vulnerable to internal violence and illegitimate governance.

Before 1980, only three countries in Latin America were considered democratic. By 1999, thirty-four Latin American states regularly conducted democratic national elections, the exception being Cuba.[5] However, the transition from authoritarian regimes to democratic forms of government is not always smooth and seamless. Often key groups are blocked from participation in the political process, reinforcing traditional two-class systems that abdicate individual rights and the rule of law in favor of group rights. Without strong institutional mechanisms that consolidate democracy and provide transparent, accountable, and professional governance the process of democratization is slowed and becomes vulnerable to disruptive forces.[6]

Despite the progress Latin America has made toward the consolidation of economic and political power within the region, U.S. – Latin American ties are becoming more contentious. The anticipated benefits in the early 1990s associated with newly elected democratic states failed to materialize. Two debilitating financial crises, in 1995 and 1998, interrupted Latin America's economic progress and revealed its continuing

[5] INSS, Strategic Assessment 1999, 175.
[6] Ibid., 175-176.

vulnerability.[7] Regional improvement in social conditions slowed to a crawl, marked by increased unemployment and inflation.

The failure by Latin American governments to solve lingering economic problems has eroded popular confidence in democracy as an institution. Although some states such as Mexico have recently conducted free elections, others remain seriously distressed, specifically within the Andean region.

> In Peru, the government of Alberto Fujimori grew increasingly autocratic and corrupt until it imploded. Colombia's elected government is losing control while democratic institutions are being battered by relentless guerrilla war and accelerating violence. In 2000, Ecuador suffered South America's first successful military coup in twenty-four years, and in Venezuela, political power is in the hands of President Hugo Chavez, who scorns representative democracy.[8]

For most Latin American countries, institutional performance has been dismal. Legislatures, courts, and government services have continued to fail to provide mechanisms for reform. Latin American problems are further compounded by the public perception that relations with the U.S. will remain much as they were twenty years ago.

Although the emerging democracies of Latin America have replaced the traditional means of protectionism and statism with private initiative, foreign investment, and export-oriented growth, they are still threatened by the unprecedented growth of transnational organizations that engage in criminal activities.[9] Insurgencies within the Andean Region with financial ties to drug cartels and growing paramilitary groups that engage in violence against those who support the insurgencies, plus the added dimension

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[7] Peter Hakin, "The Uneasy America's," *Foreign Affairs,* Vol. 80, No.2 (March/April 2001), at http://www.iadialog.org/publications/oped/uneasy_americas.html.
[8] Ibid., 2.
[9] Hans Binnendijk and John A. Cope, "The Security of the America's," *Joint Forces Quarterly* (Spring 1996), 36-37.

of institutional corruption represent a significant security challenge to the evolution of democracy.

The emergence of new security arrangements at the beginning of the 21st Century capable of strengthening fragile Latin American democracies appear dependent on developing comprehensive and integrated policies that are designed to reduce the spread of transnational threats. This requires an aggressive strategy that draws upon a variety of national and international capabilities – humanitarian, environmental, economic, political law enforcement, and military – to protect national interests.[10] Operationally, much of the challenge focuses on nonstate actors and requires what can be viewed as militarized law enforcement missions.[11]

Two major issues continue to threaten the security of the United States, the danger posed by economic instability, and the growth of the narco-insurgency in Colombia and periphery states. Colombia's problems also raise deep concerns in Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama, and Brazil about the effects of spillover violence, corruption, ecological damage, and criminal activity.[12]

The potential for disruption of the U.S. economy due to economic aftershocks caused by Latin American financial crisis, recession and violence is substantial. More than four hundred Fortune 500 companies do business in the Americas, specifically Brazil, which receives more direct foreign investment from the United States than any

[10] INSS, Strategic Assessment 1999, 178.
[11] CSIS Americas Report, *Thinking StrategicallyAbout2005: The United States and South America* (December 1999), at http://www.csis.org/pubs/sa2005exec.html.
[12] The spillover effect in the Andean Region is viewed as a problem generated by international crime, contraband, corruption, and associated violence. See Patrice M. Jones, "Colombia's Drug War Spills Into Ecuador," *Chicago Tribune*, February 13, 2001, at http://ebird.dtic.mil/Feb2001/e20010214colombias.htm; and *Latin American Weekly Report*, 27 February 2001, WR-01-09, 104.

other country except China.[13] Any destabilizing effects due to economic crisis within the region often manifest themselves in a loss of confidence in free market reforms, driven by rising public debt, capital flight, high unemployment, weak currencies, and low prices.

The greatest threat to U.S. security viewed by many in the State Department and the Department of Defense continues to be the impact of fighting the drug war in the Andean region.

> The principal security concern is transnational in nature, stemming from drug trafficking, organized crime, money laundering, illegal immigration, and terrorism. Of these narcotrafficking is the most serious danger. Illicit drugs account for roughly 14,000 U.S. deaths every year, and cost American society an estimated $110 billion. The mafias have spread corruption and violence across the Americas, subverting national institutions, endangering political stability, and making a mockery of the notion of sovereignty.[14]

From the U.S. perspective, the core problem is Colombia and its inability to resolve a forty-year old insurgency and the second and third order effects of narcotrafficking contributing to institutional decay. If allowed to go unabated, the danger is that Colombia will become increasingly Balkanized and divided among regional warlords, and that the violence will spill over into neighboring countries.[15]

U.S. involvement in solving Latin America's longstanding problems with socioeconomic integration and the establishment of lasting security relationships has largely been neglected for the last decade. By default U.S. policy continues to focus on geographic priorities of the Cold War era, setting aside serious consideration of incorporating Latin American issues into a strategic design for the future.

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[13] Anthony Faiola, "$1 Billion Flows Out of Brazil," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 1999; and "Unpredictable Congress Key to Brazilian Reform," *Ibid.*, January 20, 1999.
[14] President William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, Washington D.C.: The White House, October 1998, 5; Barry R. McCaffrey, "A Strategy for Confronting the Nation's Drug Problem," *San Diego Tribune*, August 2, 1998; and Schulz, 4.
[15] Schulz, 7-8.

Yet with a strong U.S. desire to improve trade and the establishment of a hemispheric free trade zone within the next five years, resolving the issues associated with increased levels of violence and corruption are paramount.

The equally important supporting task of ensuring that Latin America remains democratic with stable governing institutions requires a considerable policy readjustment by the United States and participation by European Allies in a multilateral effort. In short, successful engagement policies for the future remain dependent on shedding perceptions and policy options built during the Cold War, only then can Latin America move forward into the next century.

Colombia and the Andean Problem

Colombia has immense geostrategic importance to the United States and the rest of the world community.[16] Situated at the crossroads of key international and regional trade routes, the task of mitigating the conflict in Colombia and her neighbors is considered critical to the continued expansion of proposed free trade zones within the next five to ten years. Overall bilateral trade is more than $10 billion per year, and Colombia will play a key role in the anticipated economic integration of the hemisphere, the visionary Free Trade Area of the Americas, targeted for 2005.[17]

Although trade and investment have dominated almost every agenda of the states that make up the Andean Region in relations with the U.S., the primary security interest has been combating the growth of drug trafficking and the supporting criminal networks. U.S. policy for the past three decades has centered on the single dimensional approach of

[16] Colonel William W. Mendel, US Army (Ret.), "Colombia's Threats to Regional Security," *Military Review* (May-June 2001), at http://www-cgsc.army.mil/milrev/English/MayJun01/mrn.htm, 1.
[17] Gabriel Marcella, *Plan Colombia: The Strategic and Operational Imperatives*, (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, April 2001), 4-5.

stopping the export of illegal drugs at its source, leaving the more contentious issues of fighting insurgents and building legitimate democratic institutions to the host nation. Since the majority of U.S. assistance targets interdiction efforts, little support has been directed at developing stronger institutional organizations, to include judicial and domestic policing functions, capable of resisting corruption and bringing to an end a forty-year old conflict.

Despite successes by Peru and Bolivia at reducing the flow of drugs with U.S. assistance, the situation within the region has intensified.

> The drug trade has moved into southern and eastern Colombia. These remote areas are lightly populated and practically free of manifestations of the Colombian State. Over forty-percent of the national territory is outside the control of the central government, posing a serious challenge to the national unity throughout the history of independent Colombia.[18]

The problem has become further complicated over the last decade by the growth and modernization of Colombia's two armed insurgent groups, the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias Colombianas*) and the ELN (*Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional*).

The tenacity with which the FARC fought Colombian Army units and paramilitaries over control of the coca production areas in the Putumayo department in the fall of 2000 clearly demonstrates that the narco-guerrilla nexus is no longer a myth.[19] It is estimated that the FARC and the ELN make as much as $500 million per year from the coca business through extortion and taxes on producers.[20]

A third destabilizing force has been the rise of paramilitary groups. For most of the international community, specifically nongovernmental organizations providing

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[18] Ibid., 3.

[19] Jaun Forero, "Puerto Asis Journal: To Make a Point, the Rebels Are Strangling a Town," *New York Times*, November 3, 2000, at http://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/03/world/COLO.html; Jaun Forero, "Key Roads Taken From Rebels, Colombia Says," November 14, 2000, at http://www.nytimes.com/2000/11/14/world/14COLO.html.

humanitarian support to the remote regions of Colombia, the paramilitaries are particularly troublesome. Paramilitary groups are considered to have been responsible for at least seventy-eight percent of all human rights violations recorded since October 1999.[21] By contrast, The FARC and the ELN were credited with twenty-percent of the human rights violations during the same period.

Additionally, there is strong evidence supporting claims by the international community and Colombian government officials that the military remains connected with paramilitary groups. Cooperation between the two remains commonplace, supported by detailed evidence from government investigators of direct collaboration and the practice of "legalization," where paramilitaries deliver dead guerrillas to the army in return for weapons.[22]

There is an implicit recognition that Colombia's current situation has reached crisis proportions, with dire consequences for Colombian citizens, their government, neighboring nations, and the United States.[23] Violence against civilians heightens regional tensions by increasing the number of refugees crossing borders into neighboring states seeking protection. The FARC, ELN, and paramilitary groups continue to grow stronger ties with nonstate organizations that engage in drug trafficking, money laundering, and illegal weapons transfers, often for the sole purpose of financing their operations.

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[20] Marcella, 4.
[21] Human Rights Watch, "Colombia: Human Rights Developments," *Human Rights Watch World Report 2001*, at http://www.hrw.org/wr2k1/americas/colombia.html, 1.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Richard Downes, *Landpower and Ambiguous Warfare: The Challenge of Colombia in the 21st Century*, (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 1999), 1.

The dynamics of the current conflict that threatens Colombia's democracy and economy are driven by the combination of a weak justice system, corruption incited by illegal drug trafficking, and continual violence generated by narcotraffickers, paramilitary groups, and 15,000 to 20,000 guerrillas arrayed in three armies on 100 fronts.[24] Colombia's inability to address internal problems continues to jeopardize the security of the Andean Region, to include Panama and Mexico to the north. Border States are reeling under the impact of illegal immigration of Colombian nationals, cross-border attacks by paramilitaries against insurgent safe-havens, and criminal violence.

For the U.S., the root of Colombia's problem remains tied to the production and distribution of narcotics, specifically Cocaine. Assistance and support to Colombia over the past thirty years has always focused on a supply-side strategy to combat the flow of narcotics to the U.S. in order to make the "war" on drugs more palatable to the American public. Yet, the failure to stem the flow of drugs demands a new strategy that targets ending the insurgency and providing development assistance to strengthen Colombia's government institutions. It is within this context that "Plan Colombia" has been developed as a multilateral strategy for ending the cycle of violence associated with Colombia's forty-year old insurgency.

[24] Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

Colombia's History of Violence

Colombia's history of violence pre-dates the beginning of the drug trade by more than a hundred years. A bipartisan political system that excluded alternative actors politically, economically, and socially has defined Colombia's political landscape since the middle of the 19th Century.[25] Liberals and Conservatives, the two elite ruling classes, suppression of class-oriented parties established the pattern for civil conflict that would become a characteristic of the Colombian political process.

Throughout much of the early 20th Century, ideological differences between Liberal and Conservative elite triggered short-term periods of conflict between the two parties. In 1934, Colombia's new president, Alfonso Lopez' Pumarejo, enacted a program that targeted Colombia's oligarchic form of government, attempting to replace the status quo with agrarian reform, labor legislation, state intervention in economic matters, and the secularization of institutions.[26] The eventual failure of Pumarejo's reform and modernization program mobilized Colombia's large rural peasant population, leading to the outbreak of a period of unprecedented levels of violence know as "La Violencia" (the Violence) that lasted from 1948 to 1957.

The "La Violencia" period pitted Liberal and Communist led agrarian and labor reform movements against rural and elite Conservatives that were in favor of preserving the oligarchy. Although peasant uprisings occurred in urban areas such as Bogota, the civil war remained primarily a rural conflict and confined to areas where weak

[25] Arlene B. Tickner, "Colombia: A Crisis Foretold," *Current History* (February 1998), 61.
[26] Ibid.

governmental control allowed for the formation of armed self-defense groups with varying ideologies.[27]

By early 1950, the election of Conservative candidate Laureano Gomez raised the conflict to new levels. With the support of the Catholic Church and the United States, President Gomez embarked on a program to eradicate Communist Party support of the peasant factions. Pitched battles between government forces and peasant organizations resulted in the abandonment of property by large landowners as they fled to the relative safety of cities. It was apparent that the conflict had acquired a class-oriented dynamic that became impossible to control.[28]

Gomez was eventually overthrown in 1953 by a military coup, bringing to power General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla. General Pinilla quickly moved to reclaim property lost to peasant uprisings and build popular support by offering amnesty to all armed peasants. Pinilla later extended amnesty to the supporters of the former President Gomez which resulted in a renewal of violence against the peasants and a rearming of the self-defense movements.[29] In response, the Conservative and Liberal elite forced Pinilla to resign after a major military offensive failed to suppress the peasant self-defense organizations.

"La Violencia" ended with the creation of the National Front in 1958. Liberal and Conservative elite agreed to a formal power sharing arrangement in which the two parties would alternate four year terms in the presidency with all public positions in government

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[27] William M. LeoGrande and Kenneth E. Sharp, "Two Wars or One: Drugs, Guerrillas, and Colombia's New Violencia," *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 3 (October 2000), 3-4.
[28] Tickner, 61.
[29] Garry M. Leech, "Fifty Years of Violence," *The Colombia Report*, Information Network of the Americas, at http://www.colombiareport.org/index.html, 1-3.

evenly distributed between the two parties.[30] Yet, the power-sharing agreement between the two parties did little to solve the decades old problem of institutional reform.

Conflict between the elite factions was resolved, but the inability to negotiate peacefully with the armed peasants resulted in the movement of peasant guerilla bands into the remote uninhabited provinces of eastern Colombia. The peasants cleared and worked new lands in areas they declared "independent republics" in an attempt to free themselves from a national government they distrusted due to "personal experience with social and economic partisanship and their discovery of the double value system upheld by the ruling classes."[31] Colombia's newly formed government viewed the various armed peasant factions as a threat, justifying military action by defining the factions as fledgling Communist guerrilla groups. Peasant organizations were further blocked politically and economically, allowing for the distribution of confiscated lands into the hands of the large landowners.

Although the National Front had brought to an end a period of violence in which over 200,000 Colombians had been killed, the basic causes of the conflict remained intact. Power-sharing agreements between the ruling elite did little to solve deep social inequalities that precipitated the violent peasant uprisings in 1949. As a result, those groups left outside the power-sharing arrangements began to seek alternative means of expression, leading to the consolidation of numerous guerrilla movement in the 1960s, the emergence of narcotrafficking in the 1970s and 1980s, and the proliferation of paramilitary "self defense" groups in the 1980s and 1990s.[32]

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[30] Ibid.
[31] Alfredo Molano, "Violence and Land Colonization," *Violence in Colombia: The Contemporary Crisis in Historical Perspective,* Eds. Charles Bergquist, Ricardo Penaranda and Gonzalo Sanchez (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992), 1999.
[32] Tickner, 62.

The exclusionary nature of the Colombian political system set conditions for the formation of the FARC and ELN. Any opposition, popular movements, or grassroots organizations with agendas for government reform were labeled criminal in intent and denied participation in the political process.

> Political expression was further limited through the nearly permanent decree of "states of emergency." Thus, the stage was set for the development of an extra-parliamentary and conspiratorial leftist majority. Similar to the rest of Latin America, the Cuban revolution and its showcase effect would not be the only cause of this new violence.[33]

The stage was set for the evolution two of Colombia's principle insurgent groups that at the close of the century are militarily and financially stronger than ever, numbering in excess of 20,000 combatants.

Evolution of a Three-Front War and the Narco-guerrilla Nexus

The emergence of the FARC, ELN, and to a lesser extent M-19 as legitimate insurgencies with the specific objective of overthrowing the incumbent bipartisan government established Colombia as somewhat of an anomaly among states within a region famous for military dictators and ongoing peasant insurrection. Widespread violence and crime somehow coexisted in a state with a history of democratic tradition and, by regional standards, exceptional economic performance.[34] But the Colombian government's inability to respond effectively to a growing insurgency throughout the latter half of the 20th Century indicates that the country may be slowly slipping towards collapse.

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[33] Eduardo Pizarro, "Los Origenes del Movimiento Armado Comunista en Colombia," Analisis Politico, No. 7 (May-August 1989), 24.

[34] Michael Shifter, "Colombia on the Brink: There Goes the Neighborhood," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 8 (July/August 1999), 14.

The FARC and the ELN remain major players in the complex arena of violence that typifies Colombian politics.

> The FARC is the only guerrilla group with peasant roots that pre-dates both the National Front and the Cuban Revolution. In contrast, the ELN, the EPL and the M-19 were all movements led by urban intellectuals and were typical of the many Latin American guerrilla groups that evolved in the 1960's: Cuban-inspired armed reactions to the domestic political and economic situations.[35]

By 1990, the EPL and the M-19 movements had negotiated a peaceful settlement with the Colombian government and allowed to form political parties, but their leadership was subsequently assassinated by right-wing death squads with connections to the military.

Both the FARC and the ELN organized movements around Marxist ideologies during the Cold War. The FARC conducted operations primarily in the southern rural provinces, while the ELN remained concentrated in the northeast region, where Colombia's oil industry and their principle source of revenue is located.[36] Throughout the 1960s and 1970s each group maintained ties with Cuba and the Soviet Union (Russia), but have not received funding or instructions from them since the end of the Cold War.

During the first two decades of the two insurgent group's existence, the Colombian government seemed content to ignore their presence, since they remained isolated in remote areas of the country where the guerrilla leadership constituted the only authority. During this period the FARC consolidated its influence, expanded military training and engaged in the recruitment new followers, which included students, intellectuals, workers and peasant leaders.[37]

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[35] Leech, 3.
[36] Shifter, 15.
[37] Alfredo Molano, "The Evolution of the FARC," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Sep. 2000), 23-24.

Growth of the FARC and ELN remained steady and by 1982 each movement had developed hierarchical institutional structures complete with a general staff, military code, training school and a political indoctrination program. However, by 1982 the economic situation within the remote regions of Colombia had reached crisis proportions. Void of institutional support and a transportation infrastructure capable of moving cash crops to market, peasant farmers began to embrace the profitable cultivation of coca. No legal crop offered the advantages that coca could: the ease and economy of growing an Andean-Amazon plant that needs no fertilizers or pesticides, a ready market for local drug traffickers, a fixed price, and constant demand.[38]

Initially, the FARC resisted the cultivation of coca but discovered that banning coca would erode peasant support for their cause. Poverty among the peasant populations was driving the shift to producing coca. In return, the FARC provided social services and security for isolated peasant enclaves giving rise to the now famous "gramaje," or coca-trade tax that continues to fund the FARC insurgency.[39] Contrary to the popular notion that drug trafficking and coca production allowed for the consolidation of FARC political power within the coca producing regions, revenue generated from taxing coca growers contributed only fractionally to FARC expansion. Growth in the FARC was due more to a government policy that repressed popular protest and the failure to provide basic services to Colombians living in remote rural areas.

The financial benefits accrued by the FARC during the coca boom enabled the insurgency to vastly improve its military capability by acquiring modern weaponry, and provide a better standard of living to recruits. In addition the FARC was able to offer

[38] Ibid., 25.
[39] Ibid.

social and economic services in areas of credit, education, health, justice, registry, public works, and ecological and cultural programs.[40]

The FARC and ELN worked closely with narcotraffickers during the early formation and consolidation of the cocaine cartels. However, the informal relationship where guerrillas controlled coca-growing regions while the cartels managed them would soon dissolve once the Medellin and Cali cartels began investing their wealth in property.[41] The drug producing cartels took on the dimensions of the insurgent's traditional enemy and began organizing private paramilitary armies to protect their interests, often engaging in combat against guerrilla units and their sympathizers.

After 1984, the dynamics of the conflict in Colombia had changed. The FARC and the ELN controlled major portions of drug producing regions. In response, the Medellin and Cali drug cartels had formed paramilitary organizations to protect their lines of communication and conservative landowner interests. Violence in the form of human rights violations against FARC sympathizers by the paramilitaries, the increase exponentially in the kidnapping of narco-landowners and government officials, and the ELN's random interdiction of oil production in the northeastern region prompted the Colombian government to seek a political solution to the insurgency.

In 1984, then President Belisario Betancur signed a cease-fire with the FARC. The FARC saw this as an opportunity to trade the tactics of guerrilla warfare for legitimate recognition as a viable political entity, resulting in the formation of the *Union Patriotica* (Patriotic Union) and modest political success in the election of 1986. Colombia's entrenched elite, anchored by large landowner interests, viewed the UP's success as a threat and subsequently contracted paramilitary units to wage a systematic

[40] Molano, "Violence and Land Colonization," 214.

campaign of extermination against UP officials.[42] A wave of repression ensued, in which more than 3,000 UP activists, candidates, and elected officials were murdered by right-wing paramilitary groups, effectively eliminating the Patriotic Union and galvanizing the FARC's incentive to keep fighting.[43]

Overnight, Colombia's civil war became more complex and lethal. Due to the increase in drug revenues and other monies collected from kidnapping, extortion, and the corruption of government officials, the FARC expanded from roughly 3,000 combatants at the end of 1979 to more than 9,000 combatants operating on more than 27 "fronts" (local self-supporting units and semi-autonomous units).[44] It was estimated that the FARC and ELN were now taking in between $100 million and $300 million a year in taxes on coca production and commerce.

At this juncture it became unclear as to the direction that the FARC and the ELN were headed. Did the FARC and ELN still desire to shape the Colombian national agenda, or were they satisfied with maintaining autonomous control over territorial regions already owned? Most regional experts claim that FARC and ELN objectives remain the same. Yet the agendas of both groups, though they point to broad ideals of social justice, are in fact exceedingly vague and fluid.[45]

More troublesome has been the rise of the paramilitary right-wing groups. Some were organized and financed by the drug cartels and local landowners seeking protection from guerrillas, and others trained by the Colombian Army as a part of a national counterinsurgency strategy which focused on training and operating local self-defense

[41] Leech, 4.
[42] Shifter, 15.
[43] LeoGrande, 5.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Shifter, 15.

militias in areas where the military's presence was weak.[46] Paramilitary organizations evolved in much the same manner as the FARC and ELN after 1985, operating locally, regionally, and nationally under various commands, and deriving revenue from connections with drug trafficking.

Paramilitaries have flourished as a result of two enabling conditions: financing from the drug trade either through direct payments by traffickers, engagement in trafficking, or drug taxes, and tolerance (sometimes active assistance) on the part of the Colombian Army.[47] The expansion of paramilitary units, aided by a portion of $2.2 billion in U.S. economic and military support in 1990 and recognition by the Samper administration in 994 has contributed to the dramatic increase in "social cleansing," accounting for more than eighty-percent of political violence against noncombatants by 1997.[48] By the end of 1997, Paramilitary units claimed more than 6,000 members and looked to the leadership of Carlos Castano and the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) to give their organization a national voice in Colombian politics.

Colombia's problems with insurgency, deteriorating economic conditions, corruption in government, and paramilitary violence against civilians reached crisis proportions toward the end of the decade. Paramilitary violence constituted a serious threat to both the rule of law and the guerrillas with increasingly brutal consequences for noncombatants.[49] FARC and ELN combat strength had grown to a point where conventional military operations against the AUC and Colombian Army were not out of

[46] LeoGrande, 6.
[47] Ibid.
[48] James Petras and Morris Morely, *Latin America in the Time of Cholera: Electoral Politics, Market Economics, and Permanent Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 60.
[49] Gabriella Marcella and Donald Schulz, *Colombia's Three Wars: U.S. Strategy at the Crossroads*, (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, March 1999), 13.

the norm. The FARC and ELN had systematically conducted a program of territorial expansion, gaining control of more than 622 of the nation's 1,071 municipalities.[50]

Concurrently, drug interdiction efforts by the United States produced limited results. The Medellin and Cali cartels fragmented into smaller decentralized operations with the assassination of Pablo Escobar in 1993, effectively making the drug industry harder to control. U.S. interdiction and eradication successes in Peru and Bolivia under President George Bush's Andean Initiative pushed much of the coca cultivation across the border into Colombia. Since 1995, the areas under coca cultivation in Colombia have expanded by over 140 percent to over 300,000 acres in 1999, increasing net cocaine production by 126 percent, from 230 metric tons in 1995 to over 520 metric tons in 1999.[51]

At the end of 1999, the situation in Colombia had grown out of control. FARC and ELN membership had swelled to over 20,000 soldiers operating on more than 100 fronts. The FARC and ELN controlled forty-percent of Colombian territory effectively creating a state within a state. More than 35,000 Colombians over the course of the decade had fallen victim to the political and criminal violence generated by insurgents and paramilitaries, becoming one of the worst ongoing human rights disasters in modern history. Combined FARC and ELN revenues derived from narcotics taxation and extortion were estimated to have topped more than $900 million annually, enabling the

[50] Mark Chernick, "The Paramilitarization of the War in Colombia," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, (Mar/Apr 1998), 35.
[51] Statement of Jess T. Ford, Director International Affairs and Trade, *Drug Control: Challenges in Implementing Plan Colombia*, (United States General Accounting Office, October 12, 2000). 5.

two insurgent groups to purchase high-tech weaponry and support the funding of social programs for supporters that the Colombian government could never deliver.[52]

The rapidly deteriorating situation prompted Colombia's newly elected President Andres Pastrana to seek some sort of solution to the escalating violence. It was clear that by the decade's end Colombians were growing increasingly tired of fighting a civil war on three fronts. Pastrana's peace overtures to the FARC and the subsequent crackdown on the military and its partnership with paramilitary units did little to strengthen his support base with the Colombian Armed Forces and conservative Republicans in the U.S. Congress.

Although Pastrana's administration was elected on a platform for peace, he was viewed as naïve and soft on the guerrillas when he agreed with the FARC's commander, Manuel Marulanda, to create a 16,200 square-mile demilitarized zone in southern Colombia for the purpose of peace talks.[53] Creation of the zone had an immediate impact on counterdrug operations by temporarily suspending all military activities within the region. Additionally, the FARC demanded that Pastrana investigate allegations of human rights abuses and take action against paramilitary units before beginning negotiations. This raised tensions further between Pastrana's administration and military commanders, leading to a near coup d'etat by Army officers when Pastrana fired two general officers with links to paramilitary activity and human rights abuses.[54]

President Pastrana's movement toward a peaceful resolution of Colombia's civil

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[52] Brian Michael Jenkins, "Colombia: Crossing a Dangerous Threshold," *The National Interest*, No. 62 (Winter 2000/01), 49.
[53] LeoGrande, 5-6.
[54] Ibid.

war through negotiation with the FARC is not surprising, given the inability of past governments to develop an effective set of solutions for stopping the violence. The Pastrana administration recognized that in order to secure a place for Colombia in the international community for the 21st Century, a new strategic approach to solving the forty-year conflict needed to be developed, but at what cost.

Given Colombia's lack of institutional capacity to deal with the problems of governance and a public security apparatus that is inherently weak, ending the war without further escalation was problematic.[55] Pastrana would have to have help from outside sources and recognized that his position with regard to the FARC's demands was tenuous at best. From a military perspective, continued extensions of a cease-fire and enforcement of the demilitarized zone have the potential to create a strategic disadvantage for Colombia's armed forces by providing the FARC with both sanctuary and positional advantage.[56]

Pastrana's strategy for ending the struggle seems to be dependent on finding an equitable balance between running a national counterdrug operation and reaching a negotiated settlement with the FARC and ELN. However, the brewing civil-military conflict between Pastrana's administration and the Colombian defense forces reflects the military view that the only solution to the problem is to further militarize the conflict.

By the beginning of 1999, Pastrana had reached the conclusion that he needed to buy time to strengthen and consolidate his government. Developing a comprehensive operational strategy for attacking each pillar of Colombia's internal conflict with regional

[55] Marcella, 2.
[56] Mendel, 4.

coalition security assistance seemed to be the right approach. Yet, the architecture of the plan would have to include incentives for increased regional participation, to include more security assistance from the U.S. In short, what evolved was "Plan Colombia."

CHAPTER 3

The Evolution of Plan Colombia

In 1999 it was clear to President Pastrana, the Colombian people, and the U.S. administration, that the guerrilla war in Colombia was reaching crisis proportions. Colombia was fighting a war on separate fronts, one against the FARC and ELN, the other against the more decentralized drug trafficking industry.

Cocaine trafficking was at an all-time high despite regional successes in the 1980s and early to mid 1990s. Counternarcotic intelligence indicated that the production and export of cocaine would continue to rise unless steps were taken by the Colombian government to reduce the cultivation of coca. Additionally, the production of Heroin in the northeastern sector was gaining momentum and becoming a supplemental source of revenue for drug traffickers and insurgents. The situation became even more complex once administrative officials recognized the linkage between cocaine production and the growth of the insurgency.

By the end of 1999, Pastrana's attempt at building a durable peace with the FARC had achieved little in the way of advantage for the Colombian government. The policy of giving the guerrillas local authority over a secure demilitarized zone void of Colombian police and military forces in the hope that a show of goodwill would lead to demobilization and reintegration into Colombian society backfired. FARC control of the secure zone allowed them recruit, refit, train, stage for future operations, and promote the cultivation of coca.[57]

[57]Marcella, 5.

President Pastrana had reached a critical point where the failure to address the growing strength of the FARC and its source of income would contribute to the catastrophic failure of the region's strongest democratic government. He also recognized that the country was reeling under the strain of corrupt institutions, a dysfunctional judicial system, and the residual effects of economic crisis in 1995 and 1998.[58]

From the U.S. perspective, the election of Pastrana and his desire to immediately formulate and implement effective policies to end the conflict and reduce drug trafficking renewed U.S. interest in providing greater military and economic support. The United States involvement in Colombian issues had increased since the Reagan and Bush Administrations had decided to become actively engaged with military and economic support to the "war on drugs." However, the bar was raised when Colombia displaced Peru and Bolivia as the major producer and exporter of cocaine to North America.[59]

Major FARC offensives launched in early July 1999 indicated that initially, the Pastrana peace overture had failed, prompting a major policy review by the U.S. of its current counterdrug strategy.[60] Critics of then President Clinton's Colombia policy accused the administration of not providing enough support to Colombia in its fight against drug trafficking and insurgency.

It was U.S. advice that served as the catalyst for the development of "Plan Colombia." United States Undersecretary of State Thomas Pickering warned Pastrana that unless a long-term solution to the narcoinsurgency was achieved, U.S. support would disappear. Consequently, the pressure from Washington, combined with pressure for a

[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 2.
[60] LeoGrande, 6-7.

military solution from the Colombian Armed Forces, pushed Pastrana toward a strategy of escalating the counterinsurgency war.[61]

The strategic theory behind Plan Colombia is simple, linking economic development and security to the extension of peace process.[62] The core assumption is that disruption of the FARC's revenue base will impact upon their ability to conduct sustained combat operations. Likewise, reduced activity by the FARC will void the legitimate existence of the AUC and other nonaffiliated self-defense groups. Without funding and legitimate targets, the AUC and the FARC will opt for discontinuing the war and seek a negotiated settlement. The implementation of peace talks will then follow with a greater chance for the successful execution of development programs aimed at restoring civil society.

In sum, Plan Colombia represents a five-year plan costing in excess of $7.5 billion, $4 billion to be provided by Colombia and the remaining $3.5 billion shared by Latin America, Europe, and the United States.[63] U.S. approved funding for fiscal years 2000 and 2001 totaled $1.6 billion including a supplemental assistance package of $180 million earmarked for drug interdiction efforts in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Panama and Brazil.[64]

Although the aid package provided by the United States is substantial, only sixty-five percent of the amount is assistance for Colombia. Over three-quarters of the package is dedicated to military and law enforcement support, with the rest going to alternative

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[61] Ibid., 7.
[62] Marcella, 7.
[63] Ibid.; and "U.S. Aid to Colombia," Center for International Policy, at http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/aid/aidsumm.htm, 1.
[64] Barry R. McCaffrey, "Remarks on Regional Implications of Plan Colombia," US Embassy Bogota, 26 January 2001, US State Department, at http://www.embaixada-americas.org.br/colombia.html; and LeoGrande, .6-7.

development, administrative justice, judicial reform, assistance for displaced persons, human rights and peace.[65] Specific contents of the Colombia aid package and amounts are:

- Upgrades to U.S. Overseas "Forward Operating Locations" $116.5 million
- Defense Department Intelligence Gathering $62.3 million
- Reconnaissance Aircraft $98.0 million
- Treasury Department "Drug Kingpin" Tracking $2.0 million
- Aid for Colombia's Border States $180.0 million
- Aid to Colombia $860.3 million
  - Military Assistance ($519.2)
  - Police Assistance ($123.1)
  - Alternative Development ($68.5)
  - Aid to the Displaced ($37.5)
  - Human Rights ($51.0)
  - Judicial Reform ($13.0)
  - Law Enforcement / Rule of Law ($45.0)
  - Peace ($3.0)[66]

More importantly, the U.S. commitment to the region by substantially increasing military and economic aid squarely places Colombia as the third largest recipient of U.S. aid, behind only Israel and Egypt.[67]

President Pastrana's administration still faces a significant challenge in consolidating European and Andean Region support. The remainder of the aid promised by the international community has failed to materialize and prospects for assistance are

[65] "U.S. Aid to Colombia," Center for International Policy, 2.
[66] For a more complete listing of the allocation of aid see U.S. GAO Report, "Drug Control: U.S. Assistance to Colombia Will Take Years to Produce Results," United States General Accounting Office, Appendix 1 (October 2000).
[67] Adam Isacson, "Getting in Deeper: The United States' Growing Involvement in Colombia's Conflict," *International Policy Report* (February 2000), 1.

not good as long as the European Union and Colombia's neighbors view the plan as a flawed strategy that will potentially escalate violence. At the center of the debate is the amount of U.S. military aid targeted for the training and assistance of Colombian units in the field.

Critics of the plan are not convinced that the combined use of ground tactical units, police units, and the aerial spraying of coca fields with chemicals will achieve the immediate objective of eradicating crop production. Rather, a policy that focuses on crop eradication and the interdiction of production facilities increases the risk of environmental damage, human rights violations, an increase in the number of displaced persons, and unequal land redistribution.[68]

Regional partners bordering Colombia are concerned that spillover will occur, already exacerbating existing problems with the movement and presence of narcoguerrillas along border frontiers. Most portray Plan Colombia as a threat to their own security, deriding the plan as creation by the United States to support an interventionist policy.[69] Unfortunately, the lack of support financially from European Union and regional partners may have a negative affect on the ability of Colombia to prosecute the drug war and improve conditions internally.

The Impact of Implementation of Plan Colombia

Effective implementation of Plan Colombia is contingent on identifying the FARC and ELN as the center of gravity and narcotrafficking as a critical vulnerability. Without the revenue generated by the drug trade, it would have been impossible for the guerrilla movements to build a military arm capable of directly challenging the

[68] Saskia van Rheenen, "Plan Colombia Divides Europe and U.S.," Radio Netherlands, 1 March 2001, at http://www.rnw.nl/hotspots/html/colombia010302.html.

Colombian Armed Forces. Further analysis would also suggest that by suppressing or destroying the capacity of narcotraffickers to engage in the production and distribution of cocaine and heroin, substantial progress would be made toward forcing the guerrillas to negotiate for an end to the conflict because of a reduction in revenues and support.

Though couched within a counterdrug framework, the principle elements of the military aid program are taken straight from lessons learned by the U.S. in dealing with the guerrilla war in El Salvador.[70] Elite, rapidly deploying infantry battalions trained by U.S. military advisors and supported by robust intelligence collection platforms are the core components of the military aid package. Once trained, the capability to conduct rapid simultaneous operations to secure coca-growing areas targeted for eradication is enhanced and marks a significant shift from an ineffective static defensive force to one with operational flexibility.

The purpose is not to engage in decisive combat with FARC units, but to secure areas of operation and provide force protection for law enforcement officials that enter the area to make arrests, take evidence, and destroy production facilities.[71] In theory, conducting offensive operations in Colombia's major coca producing regions against growers and producers affects the FARC's ability to sustain its insurgency thereby creating a military stalemate.

Critics of the plan, specifically U.S. intellectuals and politicians, fear that mission creep will play a potential role in dragging the U.S. into a situation similar to what was experienced in Vietnam. Yet, the assumption that any shift from a counterdrug to

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[69] Mendel, 5.
[70] LeoGrande, 7.
[71] Marcella, 11.

counterinsurgency policy would diminish U.S. Congressional support for further engagement, given the realities of domestic politics, mitigates that argument.

Since the eradication of coca and the destruction of the production facilities are key objectives, the integration of plans for alternative development become important components of the overall strategy. Incentives among coca growers to switch to alternative crops have a direct correlation to falling coca prices and/or higher production costs.[72] An example is Peru in 1995-1996, where alternative development and better economic conditions effectively lowered the production of raw coca.

However, the existence of two types of growers makes the task of implementing alternative development programs more difficult. Peasant farmers are less difficult to deal and any failure to cooperate invites the use of chemical spraying to destroy crops.

> The larger industrial plantations are more problematic. The owners of these plantations are not traditional farmers, but seasoned entrepreneurs tied directly to international cocaine networks, requiring a tougher approach, forced eradication.[73]

Alternative development will only work if sustained over the long term. This implies that any existing disagreements over the implementation of Plan Colombia with the European Union and their reluctance to provide a commitment to funding for alternative development will have a negative impact on strategy.

The growing complexity of the problem caused by the introduction of multiple actors presents a significant challenge to the Pastrana administration in developing a balanced comprehensive policy capable of reducing conflict and terminating the

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[72] Patrick L. Clawson and Rensselaer W. Lee III, *The Andean Cocaine Industry* (St Martin's Press: New York, 1996), 154.
[73] Marcella, 13.

expansion of the narcotics industry. Implementation of Plan Colombia focuses on eliminating the guerrilla's source of revenue for organizational growth, yet there is no guarantee that the reduction in revenue will force the guerrillas to sue for peace and lay down arms.

Equally important, the implementation of the plan ignores the issue of paramilitary intervention to protect their own interests in the larger production facilities owned by traffickers, who initially contracted with them for security services. This is a particular thorny issue since FARC peace demands are linked to elimination of the paramilitaries. Also, there is growing speculation that a small percentage of drug revenue finances AUC operations.

Whatever the outcome, the implementation of Plan Colombia is more than a strategy to kill the drug trade.

> It is intended also to help Colombia reverse an eroding security situation created by the growing strength of the FARC, ELN, and AUC. Any division between the two issues is artificial: Colombia's insurgency and its role in the drug trade are inextricably intertwined.[74]

As long as demand for cocaine and heroin remains high and the associated costs with production and distribution are low, the guerrillas and paramilitaries will remain capable of supporting their operations. In turn, the protection of the drug trade and its associated activities (i.e. illegal arms transfers, money laundering) give impetus and funding to groups that pose the greatest threat to destabilization of the Colombian state.

[74] Jenkins, 52.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion

The implementation of Plan Colombia marks the first serious step taken by the Colombian government to redress the issue of an insurgency fueled by a revolution that started more than fifty years ago. Without a doubt the architects of the plan recognized the need for a comprehensive multilateral strategy that would provide the Pastrana administration with a solution to the complex problem of fighting a war on three fronts, while at the same time strengthening the institutional framework of Colombia's fragile democratic tradition.

Although there is wide disagreement among states with national interests in the Andean region about what course to take, there is a consensus within the international community that something must be done soon to resolve the conflict, peacefully or by force. For the United States and the European Union, the primary problem is that of narcotrafficking and the effect it has on the American and European public. For the Andean region, the issue is containment and the peaceful resolution to a guerrilla war. Finally, for Colombia the issue is ending the cycle of violence driven by deep social inequalities inherent in their form of government that threatens to destroy civil society.

The strategic focus of Plan Colombia is embedded in the ability to recognize existing linkages between the drug trade, the insurgency, and the paramilitaries. Understanding how they have evolved over the course of the last thirty years is critical to designing an operational campaign that will yield positive results. Fighting an insurgency is difficult enough, but fighting both successfully requires the will to see the problem through, making policy adjustments where needed. Colombia needs a long-term

commitment, not short-term fixes that give the appearance of a stable and functioning government.

Although Plan Colombia was designed as a comprehensive approach to ending the conflict, the bulk of the aid package is security assistance, causing opponents of the plan to argue that a military solution alone is not the answer. In fact, the refusal by the European Union and regional partners is representative of their views that the use of the military to secure drug producing areas and as force protection for law enforcement officials will cause violence to escalate, leading to near conventional warfare with the FARC and AUC.

Plan Colombia's focus on increased counterinsurgent military capability is consistent with lessons learned from successful programs in El Salvador and Peru. But, there is evidence now that suggests the victories in El Salvador and Peru were more a result of creating conditions for a military stalemate than decisive combat operations. In the case of Peru, economic conditions and the impact of price fluctuations among drug producers played more of a major role reducing the drug trade.

However, there is a need for modernized, competent Colombian military units trained in counterinsurgency tactics to restore parity with the FARC and paramilitaries. Access to drug profits for the purchase of advanced weaponry tips the balance of power in favor of insurgent forces. Currently the three Colombian counternarcotic battalions will not meet the long-term mission requirement. Especially, if the Colombian government is not successful in dismantling the AUC and other associated self-defense units.

The most troubling aspect of Plan Colombia is how to justify increased military activity against insurgent sources of revenue while engaged in the peace process.

Pastrana complicated matters initially by becoming a willing accomplice in the recognition that perhaps the FARC and ELN possessed legitimate grievances against the state. Seen by many as a strategic blunder, Pastrana's agreement with insurgent leadership to the designation of a demilitarized zone void of Colombian armed forces and law enforcement officials sent a message to the FARC and ELN leadership that Pastrana's position was weak. The decision also did not do anything to improve civil-military relations for a new administration. As a result, the FARC and ELN continue to make additional demands, while concurrently consolidating their political and economic position among the peasants in the coca growing regions.

A more complex issue is how to deal with the growing strength of the AUC and associated paramilitaries. Accused of close to eighty-percent of the human rights violations recorded by Humans Rights Watch in the last decade, the AUC has grown to possess considerable political power. Like the FARC and the ELN, the AUC is requesting to be recognized as a legitimate political party with a voice in the process. Unlike the FARC, they are well connected with the Colombian Armed Forces, insulating them to some degree from prosecution for human rights violations and other illegitimate activities.

A third issue centers on how to deal with sophisticated narcotrafficking networks. Colombians have always been tolerant of narcotrafficking to some degree. The production and distribution of cocaine and heroin represent a significant flow of monies into local economies. However, the attendant problems of money laundering, criminal violence, and weapons trafficking associated with the drug industry have not endeared the drug cartels to Colombians. Since the collapse of the Medellin and Cali cartels in early 1990, the drug industry has become more fractured and decentralized, making it

more difficult for effective drug interdiction and enforcement to stick. Additionally, continued corruption in government and the judicial system are problematic and will extend to the ineffective enforcement of counternarcotics programs against the FARC and the AUC.

The base components of Plan Colombia are comprehensive and mutually reinforcing. On paper the plan provides provisions for the strengthening of government institutions and the rule of law through its alternative development packages, but the financing of development is heavily contingent on European and regional aid which has not materialized. Consequently, the plan is only partially effective and runs the risk of failure if institutional development does not occur. One of the reasons that the FARC and ELN are successful in co-opting peasants in the growing regions is because the amount of social service support that the FARC provides far exceeds what the Colombian government can provide.

U.S. sponsors of the plan view Plan Colombia as a social development program with military support. If that is an accurate assessment, the Plan needs to be reworked to reflect levels of aid skewed in favor of development. Training additional military units, providing helicopters and high-tech intelligence gathering platforms does not constitute development. Granted, the equipment is needed to meet modernization goals for the Colombian Armed Forces and enhance security capabilities, but the lack of a substantive development package indicates that the U.S. is not serious about becoming engaged in strengthening democracy within the region.

The stratification of society is a significant obstacle to ensuring success. If the U.S. role remains focused on conducting the counternarcotics campaign, the burden of fighting the counterinsurgency campaign belongs to the Colombians. Currently, the bulk

of the fighting is done by the lower classes, leaving the segment of society with the capability to affect real change without a vested interest in the program. Perhaps that is why providing social services to peasant populations and building infrastructure to support alternative crop cultivation is nonexistent. The lack of a vested interest by the upper and middle classes of Colombian society and the political baggage of a closed two-party system has contributed as much to the growth and power of the FARC and AUC as the financial support from drug trafficking.

There a number of other significant issues that contributes to the growing problem in instability within the region. Yet the salient points remain recognizing the relationship between illegal drug trafficking and systemic violence, Colombian Armed Forces and Police capabilities, the role of the peace process, development of institutional strength, and the role played by the U.S. and the international community in providing support to conflict resolution.

Plan Colombia addresses all of the points in the preceding paragraph in some form or manner. Furthermore, the plan is acceptable to policy makers in the United States since it is couched in the terminology of fighting a counterdrug war and has the potential to set a precedence for shaping future operations against international criminal threats. Yet, determining if the reliance on a large military aid package will be counterproductive to the peace process and what effect it will have on reducing the cultivation of coca remains a concern for continued support.

Of critical importance is the issue of sustainment. Analysis of past operations against Colombian insurgents and the recent growth in FARC and AUC military capabilities suggests that Colombia's insurgency is content to maintain the status quo. This arrangement allows for the maintenance of more than a billion dollar a year

enterprise to continue. Unfortunately, Pastrana's creation of a defacto Colombian state by consenting to enforcement of a demilitarized zone is setting conditions for stalemate. The stalemate can only be broken by taking the fight to the FARC, however the insurgency may not be "winnable" using military means given the strength of the FARC and the local support they receive.

The current version of Plan Colombia provides a starting point for resolving Colombia's unfinished revolution. However when the revolution began at the beginning of the 20th Century, the situation was much less complex. One hundred years later the war is still being waged, but on three different fronts. Plan Colombia attacks two of those fronts but fails to attack the third (the AUC), and perhaps the most dangerous if Pastrana is committed to a negotiated peace with the FARC.

An alternative course of action might focus on a sequential operation, dismantling the AUC before beginning negotiations with the FARC. If the AUC is a primary source of violence as Human Rights Organizations claim, then the removal of their presence might assist in resolving current issues over land reform and the reestablishment of civil society. The key task is to find a method to substantially reduce the incidence of violence. With the peace process on-track, more substantial progress could be made on winning the drug war based on successful models used in Peru and Bolivia. Removal of the AUC as a force would also assist in restoring the confidence of neighboring countries, essentially containing a less potent conflict internally.

In summary, two hypotheses about the conflict emerge. First, the Colombian civil war is rapidly becoming an international problem, not withstanding the ongoing U.S. preoccupation with fighting the drug war over the past thirty years. Colombia's chronic state of war is the most acute problem within the region and is setting conditions for to

application of the concept of limited sovereignty to achieve a solution. Characterized as the "Bosnia of South America," the effects of war are spreading. Refugees, arms trafficking, and environmental damage are all hallmarks of this conflict. Surrounding countries are adopting the "Colombian Model" where financing of insurgent movements with drug money is stimulating production and reversing the successes of previous eradication programs.

Under the concept of "limited sovereignty" intervention by the major world powers is being discussed as a solution. The consensus is that if allowed to go unchecked, Colombia's narcoinsurgency will become a significant threat to the entire Southern Hemisphere. Although there is some agreement that a negotiated solution is a possibility, military posturing by Colombia's neighbors is at an all-time high.

Second, the Colombian government is losing its capability to preside over a negotiated settlement to the internal conflict. Colombia does not have anything to offer to the FARC or any incentives to the AUC to dismantle their organization. The confidence in the government to negotiate openly is eroded by the perception that the state is aware of the financing of the AUC by drug dealers and unwilling to stop the process. Furthermore, serious institutional problems brought on by neglect and corruption threatens to accelerate the process of destabilization. Any continuation of the war will result in the fragmentation of the state.

Finally, what role the United States should take with reference to providing aid is open for debate. Too much military aid sends a signal to the international community that perhaps unilateral intervention is on the horizon. Increased assistance may also impede a broader regional approach with more chance of success in ending the guerrilla war. The

downside of any increase in military aid is that interventionist tendencies within the region may expose the U.S. to terrorist and criminal acts of violence at home.

In the end, the success of Plan Colombia may be dependent on the resolve of the U.S. and Colombia's commitment to a negotiated peace with the FARC. Because the FARC, AUC, drug cartels, and the drug trade are linked, attacking only a piece of the problem will not create success. Alternative strategies to strengthen the plan may also include greater involvement from regional partners interested in maintaining a stable and economically viable Colombia. In the long term, a containment strategy linked to economic development that is supported by the U.S. and Colombia's neighbors may yield better results. Whatever the solution, the impending threat to U.S. national interests and destabilization of the region could have lasting affects on the future of democracy.

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